

TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE THROUGH FLASHBACK IN THE FILM “SPEAK”

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ABSTRACT

This research entitled ‘Transmission of Traumatic Experience through Flashback in The Film ‘Speak’ aims to analyze the traumatic experience of Melinda delivered through some flashback illustration as narrative device in film. The method used descriptive analysis to describe the traumatic experience in the film and the data collected is taken the screenshots that categorized based on the Discourse time and Story time in order to show when the flashback occurs. Hence, to analyze the data use Cathy Caruth (1996) examined the experience of trauma is the agony of fear and anxiety that is sometimes difficult to control due to a sudden recall memory in mind and Seymour Chatman (1980) about flashback (retrospection) in film represents the repetition of memory or reviewing the past events or situations. In the discussion found that Melinda as a teenage girl has a mental damage due to the traumatic experience that occurred in the past. The experience is told in the form of flashback that played repetitively in different moment in the film. Thus, the result reveals that the repetition of flashback is used to complement the information and reveal the Melinda’s traumatic experiences which make her could not speak out about the problem sexual violence that occurred to her.

Keywords: Film, Flashback, Sexual violence, Speak, Traumatic experience

INTRODUCTION

Trauma is excessive emotion like panic and fear as a result of an unforgettable experiences caused by unexpected event or catastrophic incident. It occurs repetitively in mind triggered by certain situation or moment that corresponds to the past event. As Freud (1942) said that trauma can be in a form of a dream that occurred wariness and fears that repeatedly bringing back into the situation of the accident, a situation from the experience he or she has before. It is happened because trauma is a painful experience that haunts its victims; this situation is known as traumatic experience.

Speak, a film that released in 2004, tells an outcast young adult in her society. As the story unfolded, Melinda turned out to be rape victim who cannot speak up for herself. The unexpected of events of rape can caused trauma that lead to her silence. Rape is traumatic experience and disclosing such event is not an easy task. Women would also feel shame and guilty which debilitate their mental and emotional. Traumatic experience reduces person ability to speak. Thus, to reveal such traumatic experience needs certain way—one of it as proposed by Caruth (1996) is using repetition in the event—called repetitions mimic the symptoms of trauma. The film presented flashback as a way to repeat an event regarding Melinda’s traumatic experience of being raped by her senior.

The elaboration above shows the importance of flashback in the course of the story. Thus, the paper attempts to dissect the function of flashback in transmitting traumatic experience.

METHODS

The method used descriptive analysis to identify the traumatic experience in the film through flashback. Descriptive analysis according to Sugiyono (2009) is used to describe or provide an overview of a research object through the data that have been collected. While, the data collected from the screenshots of film 'Speak' that would be categorized in sequence of time.

Trauma, in every context, is always described as the condition of mental illness that caused by some external factors like violence, sexual harassment, threat, or holocaust. It refers to the mental illness, however it is originally came from the Greek meaning 'wound' which refers to injury not upon the body but upon the mind (Caruth). Traumatic experience can cause someone change attitude or mental handicapped. Caruth (1996) quoted from Freud said that trauma is a hidden wound that will haunt its victim later in his/her life. The gap of time between the incident and the symptom to occur is called latency. Nightmare, repetition, and neuroses are the symptom that is experience by those who is traumatizes. Those who experienced it cannot control the symptom; it can occur anywhere, everywhere and whenever there are triggers of it.

In attempting to elucidate about traumatic experience in literature or cinema, it must be refer to "traumatic site" which usually occurred in the past. According to Chatman (1980, p.96), the text that dealing to past stories will have disjunction between *story time* and *discourse time*. Story time is duration to narrate the story (what is told) which refers to the truth or real events and mostly appeared temporally, while discourse time is duration of narrating the story (how is told) that provides the content of story.

In film, there is other term that arrangement time to transmit the past story commonly called flashback. The term flashback (*analepse*), in cinema, means to a narrative passage that "goes back" that presented visually as a scene and displayed by some effect or transition like cut or dissolve (Chatman, 1980). The Flashback that represented memory of traumas introduces partial or split in random sequences. Flashback is common technique of cinematic device that used to describe the spontaneous sense of previous moment (Turim, 2013). Such in some film nowadays, the discourse of flashback become inherent to the figuration of memory. A representation of retrospection or recalling memory within film is linked to traumatic experiences. While the flashback is the process of unraveling that memory, flashback is also one of the tools that can make a repetition in the story, thus it mimics a symptom of trauma.

RESULTS

The incongruity between discourse time and story time is shown in the frequent back and forth between present time and the past from Film Speak (2004).

Present Time

Flashback



Figure 1. Present time 'Melinda saw Rachel', 00.06.22



Figure 2. Flashback 'Melinda with her friends in the car', 00.06.44



Figure 3. Present time 'Melinda runaway to toilet after her schoolmates bullying her', 00.08.27



Figure 4. Flashback 'Melinda Panic and call the police', 00.09.11



Figure 5. Present time 'Melinda met Andy in the hallway' 00.20.54



Figure 6. Flashback 'Melinda met Andy in the party for the first time' 00.21.18



Figure 7. Present time 'Melinda saw her friend Rachel with Andy' 00.39.01



Figure 8. Flashback 'Andy raped Melinda in the car' 00.41.39



Figure 9. Present time 'Melinda looked her parents' 00.50.46



Figure 10. Flashback 'Melinda up stairs to her parents' room' 00.50.46



Figure 11. Present time 'Melinda rest in the hospital' 01.08.22



Figure 12. Flashback 'Melinda was walking home alone' 01.09.15



Figure 13. Present time 'Melinda was standing musing herself in the venue' 01.14.38



Figure 14. Flashback 'Melinda screamed in frightened after raped' 01.14.50



Figure 15. Present time 'Melinda came home with her mother by car' 01.27.47



Figure 16. Flashback 'Melinda with her friend to the party by car' 01.27.56

DISCUSSION

The film is about Melinda, the victim of rape, who tried to carry on her lives as usual while haunted by traumatic experience. She cannot find a way to overcome it since she refused to speak and no one including her parents and best friends knew that she was raped. All of them misunderstood her as being the blame who ruin the party and make them in trouble by calling the police. No one take a pain to ask her for her action. Filled with the feeling of guilty, Melinda withdrew herself from the society. She felt guilty not only because she made her friend in trouble but also she was blamed herself of being raped. All of the information of the story is presented in the fragment of Melinda's memory that occurs in flashback every time there are triggers of it. The film is told in the form of in media res. In the beginning of film before the truth is revealed, the story introduce Melinda appeared with mouth crossed out like a knit. The introduction is made based on the purpose of discourse time and story time that covers the information, but discloses it to the viewer through flashback in the form of memory chips through the course of the story. The introduction also gives a mystery to the viewer with regard to Melinda's behavior, i.e. anxiety, burden and embarrassment.

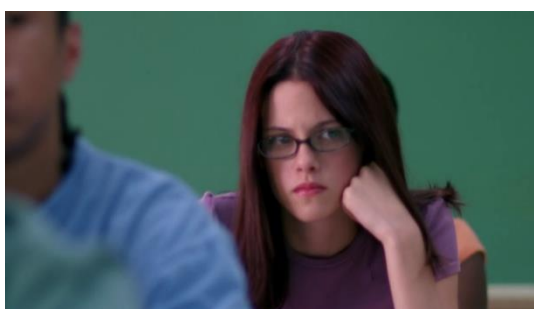


Figure 1. Discourse time 'Melinda saw Rachel', 00.06.22 (Source: *Film Speak* 2004)



Figure 2. Flashback ‘Melinda with her friends in the car’, 00.06.44 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)

Traumatic experience of Melinda began to appear when Melinda became a freshman in high school. When she just started her new school life, she felt uncomfortable and was not easy again to socialize with others and because of her traumatic experience, like when one of transfer student, Heather greeted her, she awkwardly talked to her. However, she tried to be casual when she met her schoolmates in the bus and school environment. Then the story turns to the story as Melinda enter the English class and met with her ex-best friend Rachel who no longer wanted to be friend with her. Initially, the audience was not given the information about what lead Rachel and her other best friends hated her. Until flashback appear to represent Melinda’s memories, which is when they were friends without any problem and had fun together to the party. The problem between them is still not clear in the first flashback.



Figure 3. Discourse time ‘Melinda runaway to toilet after her schoolmates bullying her’, 00.08.27 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)



Figure 4. Flashback ‘Melinda Panic and call the police’, 00.09.11 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)

Then, in the next scene, at the break time she went to school cafeteria for lunch. However, before she could find a place to eat the lunch, someone threw her something and everyone there started laughing at her. She was shocked and run away because suddenly she was being bullied and almost the schoolmates did not care about her.

Coincides after that, flashback shows Melinda who looked messy and felt scared and panic but do not know yet the reason, and then she just suddenly contacted the police. However, she could not explain anything and when the police came, everyone started freaking out and accusation toward Melinda began spread to others. Actually, Melinda tried to explain the reason why she contacted the police to Rachel, but before she explained it clearly Rachel slapped her and that make her silent. Based on the flashback, it explains the reason her friends hate and bully her. But, at that time, Rachel and her other friends did not know the problem yet and they did not found out the reason Melinda did that.



Figure 5. Discourse time ‘Melinda met Andy in the hallway’ 00.20.54 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)



Figure 6. Flashback ‘Melinda met Andy in the party for the first time’ 00.21.18 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)

Then, the flashback reappeared the next day after he met Andy in the hallway by chance while she tried to escape from the teacher. After escaping from the teacher, the trauma appears. The reason is not because the teacher who pursued her, however because she met Andy in the hallway before. In the story has not explained yet who Andy is, but the flashback that comes after he met him shows when Melinda first time met Andy at the party. At that time, she still naive when she was teased by Andy and became so easily to believe and follow him without thinking about the risks or possible situations, such as she just get to know him but instantly follow his invitation to dance. The flashback has not shown yet the reason Melinda traumatized meet with Andy.



Figure 7. Discourse time ‘Melinda saw her friend Rachel with Andy’ 00.39.01 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)



Figure 8. Flashback ‘Andy raped Melinda in the car’ 00.41.39 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)

The next day, when her new friend heather tried to invite her to join the school parade, she noticed something more painful that unexpectedly Andy, the person she feared about, has already approached her best friend Rachel. Saw them together make her remember the traumatic experience. Because of that, she got out from the audience bench and run to hide in a dark shed. The event followed by flashback that finally shows Melinda’s trauma. That was when Andy managed her to his car and she was raped in there. Due to they were in the car and in a lonely corner, no one will aware. She tried to fight but because Andy is stronger than her, she could not escape even shouted as her mouth is silenced. After the incident, her mind provoked her to anger, resentment, regret and uneasiness. Moreover, that incident made her impossible to think clearly to overcome it. She could only be silent and buried her feelings of shame and fear. Besides feeling scared, it made her blame herself although she was the victim. That is the reason she could not settle down.



Figure 9. Discourse time ‘Melinda looked her parents’ 00.50.46 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)



Figure 10. Flashback 'Melinda up stairs to her parents' room' 00.50.46 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)

Since she has feeling guilty to herself and insecure, she could not tell to anyone about her traumatic experience includes her parents as well, like at the Christmas day, she got presents from her parents, especially the drawing book with crayon. They said they always saw her drawing. Getting such attention from her parents made her thought about her trauma. The moment was followed by flashback that shows when she just arrived home and went to upstairs to her parent's room. At that time, she wanted to tell them the rape that happened to her. However, unfortunately, they were not in there.



Figure 11. Flashback 'Melinda rest in the hospital' 01.08.22 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)



Figure 12. Flashback 'Melinda was walking home alone' 01.09.15 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)

Because she still not spoken, made her more uneasy. Then, she decided to the hospital to be alone. She thought that changing the atmosphere like a quite hospital could calm her mind and got rid the trauma. However, it could not dampen her anxiety and avoid or forget the trauma. At the scene in the hospital, the flashback occurred that shows Melinda who was walking home alone in chaotic and miserable because of the rape.



Figure 13. Discourse time ‘Melinda was standing musing herself in the venue’ 01.14.38
(Source: *Film Speak 2004*)



Figure 14. Flashback ‘Melinda screamed in frightened after raped’ 01.14.50 (Source:
Film Speak 2004)

Afterward in the next day, when she passed the place where she was raped, the flashback came back again to the moment after Melinda was raped; Andy left her in the car and she started crying freaking out. The flashback reflects the trauma that made her silence. However, after she found her friend Rachel became the next target of Andy, she mustered her courage to talk of being raped by Andy.



Figure 15. Discourse time ‘Melinda came home with her mother by car’ 01.27.47
(Source: *Film Speak 2004*)



Figure 16. Flashback ‘Melinda with her friend to the party by car’ 01.27.56 (Source: *Film Speak 2004*)

After told the truth to Rachel, she became quite relieved. Since she spoke about the incident, everyone in her school knew. However because of that, Andy came back to threaten her. Fortunately, her friends heard the noise from back of shed and found them when Melinda tried to fight him back. Then, with a little injured and feared, she came home with her mother by car. On the way home, the flashback reappeared as the first. At that moment, she felt pleasure in a driven car and shouting happy through the car window. The flashback indicates that she has been healed from her traumatic experience and back to her old self. Finally, she could tell her mother the traumatic experience without hesitation again.

CONCLUSION

Thus, based on the analysis, the flashback indicates Melinda’s traumatic experience that occurs repeatedly caused by sexual violence. Her trauma made her hard to speak. Due to her action calling the police, her friend bullied her without asking the reason of her action. Traumatic experience made her feeling guilty and uneasiness. While he came to the places or things that remind her to the incident, the flashback appeared to show the traumatic experience. The transmission of traumatic experience through flashback is randomly repeated which aims to inform the reason Melinda being bullied, hated and silent gradually can be revealed clearly, especially her fear of rape. Associated to Caruth’ statement, Melinda will always trap in her trauma with fear and discomfort. Therefore, as she began to speak, she can felt lightly from the fear. In other word, flashback is like open the path of truth that cannot be easy expressed by Melinda, such as representing feeling of helplessness, guilt and shame. Moreover, Speak in the film indicates the trauma healing.

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